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A
L E T T E R
TO THE
G U A R D I A N S
OF THE
P O O R,
OF
BURY ST. EDMUNDS.

THE

OF

GUARDIANS

OF THE

P. O. R.

OF

BURY ST. EDMUNDS.



A
L E T T E R
TO THE
G U A R D I A N S
OF THE
P O O R,
OF THE
BURGH OF BURY ST. EDMUNDS,
IN S U F F O L K;

On the great INCREASE of the RATES for
the Maintenance of the POOR in that Town.

With HINTS towards an INQUIRY
into the CAUSE and REMEDY thereof;

AND REMARKS ON THE
DUTY OF A GUARDIAN.

L O N D O N :

Printed by *John Rivington*, in *St. John's-Square*;
And sold by Messrs. GREEN, DECK, and
ROGERS, BURY; Mr. SHAVE, IPSWICH;
and J. & C. BERRY, NORWICH.

MDCCLXXVIII.

[PRICE SIX-PENCE.]

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L E T T E R

TO THE

G U A R D I A N S

OF THE

P O O R

OF THE

BURCH OF BURY ST. EDMUNDS

IN SUFFOLK

On the great INCREASE of the Poor in the Town of BURY ST. EDMUNDS

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into the CAUSE and REMEDY thereof

AND REMARKS ON THE

DUTY of a GUARDIAN

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and J. C. BARNES, Norwich.

M DCCCXXXIX

PRICE SIX PENCE

That the Rates for the Relief of the Poor, are higher considerably than they were, is an indisputable Fact; and it also is as true, that they are double what they were Fifteen Years since, and very near One-third more than they were Two or Three Years ago.

The Cause of this extraordinary Demand, is a more difficult Matter to ascertain, and I am afraid the Reasons which are usually given will hardly account for it, to our Satisfaction; which are, that it is occasioned by the Advance in the Price of the Necessaries of Life; such as Provisions, Cloathing, Firing, &c. and the Increase of the lower Class of the Community.

I will not pretend to deny but there has been a considerable Increase both in
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the Price of Necessaries and in the Numbers of the Poor since the first Period which I have mentioned; and I must also allow that both these together affect the Poor Rates so many different Ways, and in so complex a Manner, that it is exceeding difficult to form a true Judgment of the combined Force of their Operation.

But since the latter Period, the Years 1774, and 1775, the Advance in the Price of Provisions, and other Necessaries, have scarcely been any, nor can the Numbers of the indigent Poor be increased in any Degree proportionate to the Sum that is found necessary for the Maintenance of them.

That Provisions, &c. are not much dearer, may be proved by the Books of

your

your Corporation, where you will find that near Two Hundred and Twenty Paupers in your Workhouse were maintained and cloathed for very nearly the same Sum, from *August, 1777, to August, 1778*, as the same Number were during the same Months, in 1774, and 1775.

Bread Corn is cheaper now than it was then; Malt is much lower; Meat is by no Means dearer; Cloathing and Firing are indeed advanced; but making an Average of the Whole, the Difference at the two Periods will be found to be very trifling.

The Want of Employment cannot be given as a Reason for the Increase of the Poor who call for Parish Assistance, for, during the whole Time we are now

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speaking

speaking of, Work of all Sorts has been plentiful; not a Murmur or Complaint on that Account; not an Industrious Person in any Branch but might have had full Employ, had they been inclined to labour; nor have the Wages been lower; in most Branches they have been exactly the same; in some they have been more; and in the Spinning of Wool, which frequently fluctuates, and in which the Women and Children of your Town are principally employed, the Wages have seldom been higher for Three Years together than they have been for these last Three Years.

Nor can the Visitation of any epidemical Disorder, which sometimes becomes pretty general, and is very expensive to a Parish, be alledged as the Cause of this exorbitant Tax.—The Poor have been remarkably healthy.

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The embodying and calling out the Militia, for the Service of their Country, can scarcely be mentioned in this Matter, as that Event did not take Place till *June* last; and though it is a considerable Charge on every Parish now, can have affected only your last Rate; indeed I think we should do very prudently to reserve this Measure, for a Reason and Justification of some future Advance.

To what then can be attributed the Necessity of the extraordinary Supply that is called for in every new Rate? and what Cause can be assigned for an Expence which every Day seems increasing, and threatens, at length, to overwhelm, in one general Calamity, all Rank and Orders of Men?

Is it, that by a Chain of Consequences the Affairs of a Parish are linked with

the State of a Kingdom; and that as Taxes and Burdens increase, the Community grow poorer by Degrees, and the lower Part of it fall the first Victims?

Does the Decrease in the Value of Money, the Increase of Rents, or other Causes still more remote, but which have Effects, though latent, occasion this great and violent Alteration in the State of the Poor?

Is it that Vice and Profligacy have so far enslaved the Bulk of the People, as to render them more and more incapable to get their Bread by an honest Calling?

Has Luxury and Indolence so far enervated them, that little or no Exertion is made by them to get their Livelihood, without seeking to the Parish for Assistance?—Do they begin their Work later

now

now than formerly?—Do they leave off earlier?—Do they mis-spend more Money and Time at a Public-House now than they used to do?—And are their Families influenced by their Example, and alike extravagant and careless at Home?

Is it that the Poor in general have overcome that decent Sense of Shame they once had, and implore, partake, and exist on Parish Benevolence, whenever the least Emergency, Difficulty, or Affliction presents itself?

Does it proceed in any Degree from Mistake, Inattention, Misapplication or Neglect, in those concerned or entrusted with the Government, or Care of the Poor?

Alas! perhaps several, or all of these have their Share in contributing to the

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Misfortune, but a Reformation in many of them, may be above your Reach and Controul; you will, however, have the Satisfaction of discharging your Duty as good Citizens, and will well deserve the Thanks of the Public, if you counteract, as much you can, the Effects of such Causes as you cannot alter, and reform those of which you have the Power.

If you examine the Analysis or Abstract of your Expenditure, which is made up in your Books at the Close of every Year, and is always open for your Inspection, you will find that a very great Part of this Enormity or Excess in the Parish Rates, arises from the numerous weekly Sums that are paid to the Poor *out* of the Workhouse, and that this Article, even exclusive of what is paid in the same Manner to the Wives and Families of Militia

Militia Men, amounts to double the Sum at this Time that it did about three Years since.

That Houses of Industry, or Work-houses, are useful Institutions, Experience seems now to have fully proved,—that they are particularly necessary in large Towns I think cannot be doubted, where Casualties are frequently happening; where many of the Inhabitants are Lodgers and Inmates, who in Time of Affliction cannot be lodged or maintained at their respective Places of Abode,—where frequently a whole Family of Orphans are left without Relations or Friends to take proper Care, or proper to take the Care of their Maintenance, Instruction, or Employment; and where Age and Infirmary often implore some hospitable Gate to afford them shelter
from

from the Storms of Poverty and Affliction.—Such Institutions in large Towns have not also the common Objection lie against them, which is sometimes brought, against such Establishments in more extensive Districts, where the Poor are to be removed to a great Distance from their Friends and former Habitations; nor are they in these Places denied a reasonable Intercourse with Society, or restrained from the Exercise of their natural Liberty any more than is consistent with their own Welfare.—The Aged and Infirm, who are incapable of Labour, have Leave given to attend the Service of the Church, generally every Day, as the best Way of employing their Time, and preparing themselves for that Change which they must shortly experience; the whole Family begin and end the Day with imploring the Pro-

Protection and Blessing of the Author and Preserver of their being, and with praising Him for his Mercies.—The Young are habituated to Diligence and Industry; their Food is wholesome, and proper to promote their Growth and Nourishment; their Cloaths are decent and comfortable; and Cleanliness, that great Preservative of Health, is visible in their Countenances.

How very different is such Treatment, Education, and Accommodation, from what is generally observed amongst the Poor at large, where a *Want* of all these is frequently found; and a Habit of Mind and Body contracted, which Laziness, Filth, and a total Want of Religion, are well known to establish.

It must appear to every thoughtful Person, who has made any Observation

on the Poor, that to relieve them, without having any Restraint or Government over them, is a very imperfect and impolitic Charity; and that of all things you can entrust them with, *Money* is the least likely to do them Service, as the improper Use they have made of it, is most probably the chief Reason of their craving your Assistance.

How often is the Money given to them to alleviate their Miseries, expended on their Vices?—How often is that which is weekly allowed to support a starving Family, instead of being appropriated to that Use, squandered away for an intoxicating Draught? How often is the Alms that is implored for an aged Parent, wasted by the Children, and never reach the miserable Object it was intended for?—How frequently is Parish Bounty solicited
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by those who neither want nor deserve it? How often are the Receivers of it less necessitous than many of those who contribute to the Cess, from which the Relief is afforded? How often is the Relief continued long after the Occasion that first gave rise to it? Nay, how notorious is it to common Observation, that when once a Family, or any Part of it, have got over the Delicacy, and have once received Parish Support, they seem both unwilling and unable to live without it, at least but for short and Summer Intervals.

I would not here be understood to insist, that there are no Circumstances which may make it proper to extend Parish Relief without receiving the Object into the Workhouse; there are doubtless some, such as the temporary

Illness of the Father or Mother of a large Family, and many others not necessary to discriminate here, nor indeed so easy as to determine with Propriety when the Object comes before you; but thus far I think I may hazard an Opinion, that where a Workhouse is established, and well conducted, that all Relief out of it should be merely temporary, and that there should be no constant Pensioners on the Out Poor List.

These are well known to have been the Sentiments of a late very humane and upright Magistrate amongst you, a very zealous Friend to the Poor, the Father of the present Establishment for them in this Town, and a very rigid Oeconomist.

Such a Regulation as this will much lessen the Multiplicity of your Concerns,
and

and bring the Objects of your Attention nearer to one Point of View, which alone must be a considerable Advantage to you; for the Office of Guardian is a very important one, and requires great Care and Industry to execute it properly, and those who are elected to it should be Men of Abilities, Leisure, Humanity, and Firmness.

You, Gentlemen, are constituted by the Law of the Land, the Friends of the Unfortunate, the Fathers of the Orphan, the Protectors of the Widow, and the Stewards and Distributors of the Charity of the Public; and reduce your Business to the smallest Scale and simplest Mode you can, yet exceedingly various, and of great Consequence, you will find those Things which call for your serious Enquiry.

Are

Are your Magistrates upright, independent, and impartial, uninfluenced by selfish Views or party Prejudices, and solely actuated by a Desire to promote the public Good?—Are you assisted with wise and prudent Council at your Sittings or Courts, to give you Advice in Matters of Difficulty, and to guide you safely through that wide and intricate Field of Controversy, the Parochial Laws; equally disinterested to preserve you from vexatious and unnecessary Litigation, as resolute to defend you from the many Impositions, which are daily practised on great Towns by selfish Country Overseers?

Is your Beadle diligent and active in his Office?—Does he duly give Notice of all Persons who come to reside in your Parishes without Certificates, particularly

larly of single Women of bad Character, who are likely to be an Expence?—and of all improper, idle, or disorderly Persons, who are strolling about the Town, common Beggars, &c. &c? Has he a Salary for this Business, or is he rewarded according to his Industry?—Does he live in your Workhouse, and has he any Employment there which takes up his Time, and engages his Attention, which might be more advantageously employed?

—Is the Master of your Workhouse a careful, prudent, sober, industrious Man, humane in his Disposition, and conversant in that Manufactory in which the Poor are employed?—Is the Mistress notable for her Activity, Cleanliness, and Oeconomy?—Is she sensible, and tender hearted?—Have they a very large
Family

Family of their own?—Are they brought up in the House with them, or out of it?—Is the Salary of the Master and Mistress sufficient to make it worth their Attention; or, considering every Necessary of Life is found them, (Apparel excepted) are they paid more than useful Persons in their Station deserve?—Are there any Perquisites besides their Pay? And what are they?

Are the Old and Young kept as separate and distinct as possible?—Is their Food such as is proper for the Nourishment of the one, and the Comfort of the other?—Are the Sober, Peaceable, and Diligent rewarded, and the Turbulent, Lazy, and Vicious punished?—Are the Punishments proportioned to the Offences?—Are the severest ones never given but under your own Eye?

Are

Are there any in your Workhouse that are too old to learn to Spin, and yet not so infirm but that they are capable of Labour?—Are they employed in such Work as they can perform?—Under the Direction of the Surveyors, to rake the Stones into the Cart Ruts, fill up the small Holes in the Roads, let off the Water, or in cleaning the Highways, or in any other Thing which can benefit the Public, or by which they can earn any Part of their Bread?—and I mention these Employments only because every Person who can carry a Shovel, or a Hoe, may execute them. No Person should eat the Bread of the Public, and be idle.

Are the Necessaries of Life bought for the Use of the Workhouse by proper Persons who understand the Value, at

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the best Market, at the lowest Price, and for ready Money?—Are they bought of the Parishioners, where it is possible, sometimes of the one, and sometimes of another, without Favour or Partiality?

Are the Children of your House, when they arrive at a proper Age, and at an Age when it would be improper to live together longer in mixed Society, put out to suitable Places?—Are the Boys apprenticed to useful and laborious Trades, or put to creditable Services; and the Girls placed in Families where they can be instructed in such Work as is proper for their Sex and Condition?—Are there any charitable Sums come to your Hands for the apprenticing poor Boys, and are they faithfully applied?

Are your Poor properly attended in the important Article of Medicine?—

And

And in what Manner is such Attendance recompensed?—Are the Surgeon and Apothecary the same Person or not?—Is there a Salary appointed for the one, and is the other allowed to bring in a Bill?—Is there not a very great Increase in the Apothecaries Bills within a few Years?—Have you more Apothecaries than one?—Is there a Charity for the poor Inhabitants of your Town to be attended in the Branches of Physic and Surgery; and is not such Charity confined only to those who do not receive Relief from the Parish?

By the almost general Relief that is now extended, is not such Charity almost useless; nay, has it not frequently introduced new Apothecaries and their Patients to you, and have been the Cause of an Expence to you, instead of a Benefit?

I mention this Matter to you particularly, because it has been publicly said, that the Poor of the City of *Norwich*, together with the different Work-houses there, are supplied in this Article for little more than twice the Money which it costs your two Parishes, and the Proportion in the Number of the Poor in those Places is known to be exceedingly different.—God forbid that I should suggest any Thing even similar to farming out the Poor, for their daily Bread, but very different do I conceive a Bargain made with a low and avaricious Contractor to furnish the Poor with their Necessaries of Life; and the Appointment of a Salary to a liberal, learned, and reputable Practitioner of the healing Art.

Very sorry should I be, if what I have said on this Head could be construed
into

into the most distant Imputation, either of Neglect, or Overcharge, against the worthy Gentleman who now attends the Workhouse, and Part of your Out-Poor.—I dare engage that your Poor are punctually and conscientiously visited, and that his Demands are very reasonable; but the Custom of charging for every separate Medicine, and every distinct Attendance, I believe is very unusual in Parish Affairs, and of bad Tendency: and when the Appointment, in future Times, shall be in other Hands, the Consequence may be worse. I would by no Means wish, but that the Business should be amply paid for; and the Attendance on a numerous Poor, is always esteemed by the Faculty as beneficial in other Points besides the mere Gain.

Are the Rates and Assessments of your Parishes equal and fair; or are some Persons

sons rated at the Full of their Rent, others at Three-Fourths, some at One-Half, and others at One-Fourth?—Are others not rated at all, or, what is nearly the same, do they refuse to pay, and are not compelled?—Are your Rates legal?—Or is the Owner sometimes charged, instead of the Occupier, which is never done without a sinister View, is a Method clearly against all Law, and opens a wide Door for Fraud?—Does not your Act give you a Power of obtaining the Value of every Occupation, by examining any Inhabitant on Oath, touching any Matters relating to your Corporation?

Are your Vestry Clerks accurate and exact in making your Rates, that your Overseers have no extraordinary Trouble in collecting and settling them, or are the Rates and Assessments blundered together

gether in a Manner that would disgrace
a School Boy?

'Tis to you, Gentlemen, the elected
Guardians, that I principally address my-
self; for it cannot be expected, that the
perpetual Guardians, constituted so by
Act of Parliament, can give that active
and diligent Attendance, which your
Constituents expect from you. They
were made Part of your Corpora-
tion by the Legislature, as being Men
of Age, Experience, and Independence,
to give Weight and Consequence to your
Body, to preserve to you Respect, and to
enforce Obedience to your Commands.
But it never can be supposed they can
either have Leisure or Inclination to de-
dicate the Whole of their Time to the
Service of the Public; whereas you who
are elected only for a Term, like Springs
which

which are sometimes relaxed, are renovated with fresh Powers for Action. Almost every Inhabitant indeed has it much in his Power to contribute to the Well-being and good Government of the Poor; and those public-spirited Gentlemen, who have this last Year, on the most disinterested Principles, erected a large Number of decent and substantial Cottages, to let at an easy Rent to poor Families, cannot be sufficiently commended. The Want of them was a general Complaint before, and the Scarcity of them occasioned an Advance in Rent, and much Distress to many industrious Persons.

Nor can there be too much Encouragement shewn, by either the Parish Officers, or Inhabitants, to such Persons amongst the Poor, who are Members of
any

any Society which engage to support one another during Sickness. They ought certainly to be excused Parish Burdens, provided they occupy a Tenement and Ground no larger than sufficient for their Families.

Associations of this Sort are always of Service to the Public, and frequently of great Use to the Members, besides the immediate Benefit they receive from them in Time of Affliction. The Money they contribute to the Fund is paid in such small Quantities that it is not missed from their slender Incomes; and it teaches them this useful Lesson, that great Sums are easily raised, by a prudent Application of a Number of small ones; and though it is a very evident Truth, that great Things are generally atchieved by an Attention to minute Matters, a Con-

viction of it is not brought Home to the Senses of the common People effectually, by any other Way than by Example and Demonstration.

It would be a great Benefit to every Parish, and particularly to large Towns, if the Deputy-Lieutenants of the County would hinder, as much as possible, any poor Man, with a large Family of Children, from engaging as a Substitute in the Militia, for one who has no Family, or only one or two; a Practice not only hurtful to the Public, but seems contrary to the Spirit of the Militia Laws, which excuse every poor Man from serving, who has three Children born in Wedlock.

I cannot in this Place help taking Notice of a Matter exceedingly detrimental

tal to the Poor of your Town, and to the
 Soldiery quartered there, which is that of
 a licensed House in the most public trading
 Street,—opened purposely for the Sale of
 that vile and abominable Composition,
British Spirits, in small Quantities; the
 Retail Sale of which baneful Ingredients
 has been restrained by every Part of the
 Legislature, and discountenanced by
 every good Magistrate; nor can it be said
 that such a House was either wanted, or
 is used for the Entertainment of Strangers
 or Travellers, nor had long Custom given
 a Sanction to the Toleration, the House
 never having had a Licence before since
 the Town was governed by an Abbot.—
 The Consequences of it are, the impo-
 verishing the Poor, the corrupting their
 Morals, destroying their Vitals, and
 rendering them fit for any Act of Enter-
 prize and Desperation.—This Matter

is rendered of still greater Notoriety, and much more unaccountable, by a Licence being at this Time refused to a House lately opened for the rational, liberal, and refined Amusements of a Coffee Room and Assembly House, for the Reception, and temporary Residence, of Strangers, calculated to promote Urbanity and Society amongst the better Sort of People in the Town, and honoured by a Subscription of the greatest Names in this County.

Surely there must be better Reasons for such seeming Inconsistencies than those which have hitherto been laid before the Public. —————*

* Since this Letter went to Press, a Licence has been granted to the Assembly House, through the spirited Interposition of the Country Gentlemen, and the Prudence, good Sense, and Moderation of the Alderman, and J. O. Esq.

I shall

I shall now conclude, without making any further Remarks. By engaging in your Duty with Ardour, many others will strike your Observation.—Remember the Care of the Poor is an honourable Office, and that you are accountable for the due Execution of it not only to your fellow Men, but also to Him in whose Eyes both Rich and Poor are alike, and who has, as a Reward for the Virtues of Humanity and Charity for our poor Brethren, engaged both the Promises of this Life, and of that which is to come.—“ Blessed is He that considereth the Poor, The Lord will deliver Him in Time of Trouble. The Lord will preserve Him, and keep Him alive, and He shall be blessed in the Earth; and thou wilt not deliver Him into the Will of his Enemies. The Lord will strengthen Him on his Bed of Languishing; thou wilt make all his Bed
“ in

"in his Sickness,"—And "Come ye
 "Blessed of my Father, inherit the King-
 "dom prepared for you from the Founda-
 "tion of the World.—For I was an
 "Hungred and ye gave me Meat: I was
 "Thirsty, and ye gave me Drink: I
 "was a Stranger, and ye took me in:
 "Naked, and ye cloathed me. Verily
 "I say unto you, in as much as ye have
 "done it unto one of the least of these
 "my Brethren, ye have done it unto
 "me."

Bury, 23d November, 1778.

F I N I S.

